I've Got a Secret

You'll Never Guess Who Leaked It to Me; Maybe Somebody Who 'Hates' Leaks

By Ann Devroy

EARLY IN the 1988 primary campaign season, my phone started ringing off the hook. Look at Pat Robertson's fundraising apparatus, the callers said: He is using religious donations from his televangelical ministry to run a campaign, a blatantly illegal operation.

Check out the campaign team around Sen. Bob Dole (R-Kan.), another caller whispered: It's total chaos and hysteria. Ask Jack Kemp, the New York Republican, how much money he borrowed yesterday to keep his campaign running, gloated another caller: You'll find out his campaign is hopeless because he can't raise the cash.

Who was whispering all these negative things about many of the Republican class of candidates? Other Republicans, of course, and many of them the same Republicans who cried crocodile tears about the terrible injustice of the leak of Anita Hill's charge that she had been sexually harrassed by Clarence Thomas.

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Politicians leak. And Republicans, despite their recent outrage, can leak as well as the best of them—maybe better.

Remember John Tower, President Bush's first nominee to be secretary of defense? His name was barely in the newspaper as a potential nominee when Republicans, not Democrats, began calling to question the choice. Two of my callers were, it seemed to me, truly concerned about whether Tower had the right "temperament" to head the Defense Department. From long associations with him, they had their worries. One caller, long after the leaks about Tower's alleged drinking and other personal problems had emerged, called back and added details about an incident that, it turned out, the FBI had also found in a background check on Tower.

Was that an illegal leak of information in an FBI report? Some might say so because the information was, in fact, in an FBI report. But it was also information based on personal knowledge of an incident. It is not a crime to tell reporters bad things about people who are being asked to serve in the highest level of government.

Clarence Thomas, meanwhile, was a central figure in a veritable deluge of leaks. The most prominent one was Anita Hill's allegation, but Republicans were leaking to help Thomas, too. Shortly after he was nominated, a Republican and I were discussing his chances. Reporters around the country were concluding their early investigations of the nominee, who was a stranger to all but a few Washington insiders. Knowing that serious personal allegations can kill a nomination a lot faster than ideological challenges, this source told me that Thomas was clear—that his FBI reports from this and prior confirmations for other positions had found nothing to disqualify him.

When I noted there was a lot of gossip about drug use in the distant past, the Republican dismissed it. The only thing that showed up, he said, was experimental marijuana use in college. Thomas, he added, had himself revealed that fact in each of his confirmation interviews, and President Bush had decided early in his administration that such incidents would not disqualify anyone from service in the government.

Why did the Republican tell me Thomas once tried marijuana? I assumed it was to innoculate Thomas from a later "revelation" that would take on larger and maybe controversial meaning closer to the confirmation vote. Was that a leak of FBI information? Bush might call it that in other circumstances, but the first rule of leaks is this: Leaks that further your aims are acceptable, sometimes brilliant strategy, and those that hurt your aims are vile, perhaps illegal and certainly perpetrated by the other side with malice.

Republicans, as President Reagan and now President Bush have found out, like leaks as much as Democrats. They use them to force public debates on issues that might overwise be decided behind the closed doors that Bush loves so much. They use them to explain the idiocy of policy formulations being made by their ideological oppositites, whether Democrats or other Republicans. They use them to warn allies that they should register their opinions quickly before the policymakers shut off the argument. They use them to explain the fallacy in a decision the president is about to make. They use them to stregthen and support a possible action the president might take. They use them to diminish their enemies and bolster their friends. They use them when they think the president is going to make a tragic or stupid mistake. They use them when they think the president is doing something courageous and should get some internal support. They use them when the president won't pay attention to their ideas or concerns. They use them when they think the president is being wrongly served by his (other) aides.

And while Republicans are busily leaking all this to reporters, anonymously of course, the public is finding out what makes the White House work. Or not work.

Republicans who bemoaned the Anita Hill leak today are the same Republicans who may be whispering tomorrow about the latest policy dispute or personal controversy inside party and administration circles. I hereby thank them for calling in the past and am counting on them to call again. A reminder: My number is 202-334-7459. The phone lines are open.

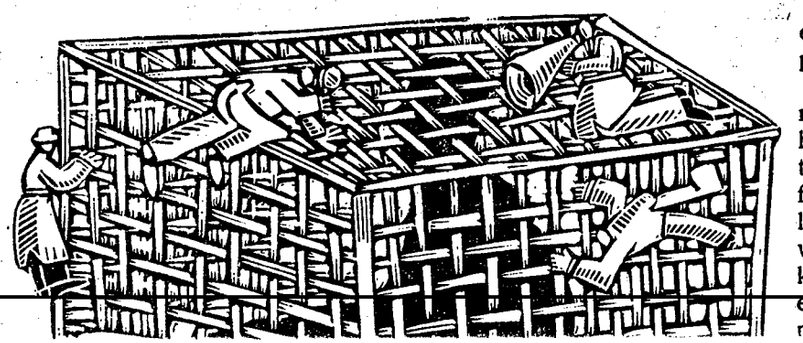
Drowning in a Leak

LEAKS, From C1

not the leak was authorized and check the appropriate box. This check heads off mistakes. A Justice Department study in 1984 found that many FBI leak investigations reveal that the disclosures were more or less "authorized" by Cabinet level officials or the White House.

seen the report prior to the leak. He added, though, that he had read Hill's confidential statement, but placed it back in a sealed envelope to be returned to the committee.

Metzenbaum complained that he is still on the "list of suspects." Mitchell seemed to be presenting his defense, too, by claiming no one in his office has never been accused of leaking because his staff know he will fire



edged that a question I discussed with a reporter was not classified after all.

But again, I had a lot of help. Within days of my public firing, four Republican senators hired me and championed my case. By chance, they knew firsthand of my two year crusade for the Stinger decision. They could not believe I had a motive to leak something that would jeopardize its implementation. They also knew that I had passed a full CIA polygraph examination in 1983 while on the Senate staff prior to going to the Pentagon. Senators David